

# Grand Ronde water nearing all-clear stage

By Dean Rhodes  
Smoke Signals editor

Although he has not yet announced that the Grand Ronde Community Water Association system is totally free of coliform bacteria, Manager Karl Ekstrom says that samples taken over the last four months have all come back clean.

Since samples that detected coliform bacteria in the water in October, samples taken in November, December, January and February have not.

Ekstrom said he takes two samples on the same day at different points in the water system and then sends them to a state-certified laboratory for testing.

This is good news for Tribal

Emergency Operations Coordinator Jamie Baxter, who says she has heard through the local “rumor mill” of people concerned about possible illnesses caused by consuming the water.

Ekstrom said the Water Association has not received any calls about people getting ill, but has received calls from customers who do not like the residual chlorine in the water. The chlorine was used to clean storage tanks after October’s positive tests.

“People out here are used to non-chlorinated water, so a little chlorine is noticeable,” he says.

According to Oregon Public Health’s Drinking Water Data, the Grand Ronde Community Water Association has experienced

positive coliform bacteria tests for seven straight years, from 2009 through 2015.

Coliform bacteria are generally not harmful since they are naturally present in the environment. However, they are used by health officials as an indicator of other potentially harmful bacteria that might be present. Follow-up testing did not find more harmful bacteria, such as fecal coliform or E. coli, Ekstrom said.

Jim Solvedt, Environmental Health supervisor with Polk County, said that finding coliform bacteria in rural water systems is not that unusual since biomass build-up inside the pipes is common.

“I think Karl has learned that he has to scour the lines more often and he is using the state-of-the-art process of ice pigging, or running a slurry of ice through the pipes to knock off the biomass,” Solvedt said.

Solvedt said the Grand Ronde Community Water Association is one of the few systems in Oregon that does not chlorinate and the water originates from a spring. “It’s a really good source of water,”

he said.

However, Solvedt warned, new federal drinking water rules that will require less testing but be more punitive when coliform bacteria is detected may eventually force Grand Ronde to chlorinate its water.

Solvedt said Polk County has not received any calls regarding illnesses suspected of being caused by the local water.

Grand Ronde Health Services Director Kelly Rowe said Grand Ronde Health & Wellness Center providers have not reported any patients suspected of getting sick from drinking the local water.

People with specific health concerns who are worried about drinking water that has coliform bacteria in it should consult their doctor, drink bottled water or boil their water before use. If you choose the latter, heat the water until bubbles come from the bottom of the pot to the top, let it reach a rolling boil for one minute and then let the water cool.

The Grand Ronde Community Water Association has more than 950 customers in the local area. ■

## Sheriff’s Advisory Team seeking participants

Polk County Sheriff Mark Garton has formed a nine-member Sheriff’s Advisory Team, which will review current issues relating to law enforcement, quality-of-life issues and Sheriff’s programs.

Five members, including Tribal Council member Denise Harvey, have already been selected. The four remaining positions will be appointed after a selection process occurs by those already on the team.

Citizens who are interested can turn in an application to the team, which will review them and then make a recommendation to Garton.

Team members will be required to attend monthly/quarterly meetings and represent their community’s concerns and provide insight and guidance to the Sheriff’s Office.

New members will serve two-year terms and receive a minimum of 10 hours of training during the first six months of their appointment, as well as receive ongoing training. Members also must undergo a background check because they may deal with sensitive law enforcement information during their term.

For more information or to obtain an application, contact Garton at [Garton.mark@co.polk.or.us](mailto:Garton.mark@co.polk.or.us) or call 503-623-9251, or visit [www.co.polk.or.us/ms/volunteer-application](http://www.co.polk.or.us/ms/volunteer-application) on the Internet. ■